

PATENT

REMARKS

Claims 1 and 3-14 are pending in the present application. Claims 1, 3, 6, and 11 have been amended, and claims 2 and 15-17 have been cancelled without prejudice. Accordingly, claims 1 and 3-14 are presented for consideration by the Examiner in light of the following remarks.

In the Office Action mailed April 11, 2003, the Examiner rejected claims 1, 2, 6, 8, 11, and 12 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Sauer (U.S. Patent 6,049,543) in view of Bolon (U.S. Patent 5,822,420). The Examiner further rejected claims 3-5, 7, 9, 10, 13, and 14 under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over Sauer in view of Bolon, and further in view of Vucetic (U.S. Patent 5,873,036). The Examiner further objected to claims 15-17 of the present invention as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but being allowable if rewritten in independent form.

In the interest of advancing the prosecution of the present application, and while not necessarily acquiescing to the aforementioned art rejections, Applicants have amended claim 1 to include the limitations of cancelled claims 2 and 15, amended claim 6 to include the limitations of cancelled claim 16, and amended claim 11 to include the limitation of cancelled claim 17. Additionally, claim 3 has been amended to change its dependency. In view of these amendments, Applicants submit that the aforementioned art rejections are now deemed moot and claims 1 and 3-14 are now in condition for allowance.

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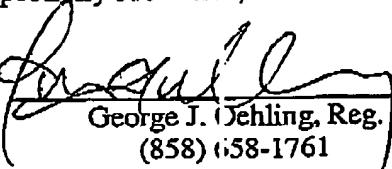
REQUEST FOR ALLOWANCE

In view of the foregoing, Applicants submit that all pending claims in the application are patentable. Accordingly, reconsideration and allowance of this application is earnestly solicited. Should any issues remain unresolved, the Examiner is encouraged to telephone the undersigned at the number provided below.

Respectfully submitted,

Dated: February 12, 2004

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